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World demographic trends

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, prepared in accordance with resolution 1996/2 of the Economic and Social Council, provides an overview of demographic trends for the world, its geographic regions and selected countries, and for various development and income groups. It focuses on major demographic changes during recent decades, as well as projected changes during the time frame for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond. The topics covered by the report include population size and change, fertility and family planning, mortality, changing population age structures, urbanization and city growth, and international migration, including recent trends in the number of refugees and asylum seekers.

According to a recent assessment by the United Nations, the world's population numbered 7.6 billion in 2017 and is projected to grow to around 8.6 billion in 2030. Most of the growth between 2017 and 2030 is projected to take place in Africa and Asia, with each geographic region adding around 0.4 billion people. In 2050, the world's population is expected to number around 9.8 billion. Projections of future trends suggest that the growth of the world's population is likely to continue at a slower pace after 2050. Moreover, the global population could stabilize at a level of roughly 11 billion people around the end of the century. In the short run, however, it is expected that the world will continue to see rapid changes in population size and population distribution by age, with important consequences for sustainable development.

Since the adoption of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, most countries have experienced rapid demographic changes. Today, there is a great diversity of demographic situations

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across countries and geographic regions, presenting various opportunities and challenges with regard to sustainable development. Early progress has been made towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals since their adoption in 2015. Nevertheless, population is still growing rapidly in most of the countries facing the greatest challenges with regard to ending poverty and hunger and ensuring health, education and equality for all. Many women in those countries report a desire to limit or postpone childbearing, yet their need for family planning is not being met through the use of modern methods of contraception. In this context, sustained and reinforced efforts will be needed to ensure that all countries meet the internationally agreed Goals and targets by 2030.

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I. Introduction

1. While the world's population continues to grow, there is a considerable variety of demographic trends across countries and geographic regions, and across development and income groups. The main demographic trends are determined by a declining level of fertility at the global level and by increasing levels of life expectancy at birth in almost all countries, which are causing a gradual ageing of populations worldwide, albeit in varying degrees. Some countries are still in an early phase of the demographic transition, with high proportions of children and youth, while in other countries the number of persons at older ages is growing faster than in the younger age groups. As reviewed during the fiftieth session of the Commission on Population and Development, the transformation of the age structure of human populations has major implications for sustainable development.

2. Human mobility and international migration are, more and more, shaping the size and characteristics of populations at the global, national and subnational levels, including their spatial distribution. Both internal and international migration are selective in terms of age, sex, level of education and other factors. For these and other reasons, migration can affect national and local trends relating to poverty, employment and other aspects of sustainable development.

3. More than half of the world's people live in urban areas, and projections indicate that the future growth of the human population can be accounted for almost entirely by a growing number of city dwellers. In many regions, the share of population living in cities, as well as the number and size of cities, will continue to grow, driven by a combination of factors, including a surplus of births over deaths in urban areas, migration from rural to urban areas and urbanization of formerly rural areas. Many cities attract considerable numbers of international migrants and play an important role in the integration of these new residents into the host society. Population growth and urbanization are also transforming the lives of those living in the rural areas around cities.

4. The number of international migrants, refugees and asylum seekers has reached historically unprecedented levels in recent years. The multidimensional reality of international migration is of major importance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination and requires adequate policy responses so that migrants and their families can make a better life for themselves and their families, while also contributing to the economic and social development of their host society and, potentially, their communities of origin as well.

5. The global demographic trends presented in the present report are based mostly on data contained in *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, which constitutes the twenty-fifth round of official United Nations population estimates and projections, prepared biennially by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. The report also draws on other databases created and maintained by the Population Division. Data on urbanization and on the size and growth of cities are from *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*. Data on the number and composition of international migrants and refugees are from *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision*. Data about contraceptive use and the unmet need for family planning are from the World Contraceptive Use 2017 data set and Model-based Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2017. Information about government policies regarding selected demographic trends is from the 2015 revision of the World Population Policies Database.

II. Population size and change

6. The world's population reached an estimated 7.6 billion in 2017 and is expected to grow to slightly more than 11 billion in 2100 (see table 1). Currently, the global population is growing at 1.2 per cent per year, adding approximately 83 million people annually. The global growth rate is expected to decline to about 0.5 per cent by 2050, driven by a continuing decline in levels of fertility.

Table 1
Population of the world, by development group, income group and geographic region (millions)

Development group, income group and geographic region	*Estimates*			*Projections*		
	1970	*1990*	*2017*	*2030*	*2050*	*2100*
World	3 701	5 331	7 550	8 551	9 772	11 184
More developed regions	1 009	1 147	1 260	1 290	1 298	1 285
Less developed regions	2 691	4 184	6 290	7 261	8 474	9 899
Least developed countries	308	511	1 002	1 334	1 917	3 199
Other less developed countries	2 383	3 673	5 288	5 927	6 557	6 701
High-income countries	851	1 000	1 192	1 250	1 288	1 288
Middle-income countries	2 652	4 006	5 679	6 362	7 067	7 376
Upper-middle-income countries	1 448	2 079	2 624	2 767	2 790	2 397
Lower-middle-income countries	1 204	1 927	3 055	3 595	4 277	4 979
Low-income countries	196	323	677	936	1 413	2 516
Africa	366	635	1 256	1 704	2 528	4 468
Asia	2 138	3 221	4 504	4 947	5 257	4 780
Europe	657	722	742	739	716	653
Latin America and the Caribbean	288	446	646	718	780	712
Northern America	231	280	361	395	435	499
Oceania	20	27	41	48	57	72

7. While the population of high-income countries[1] is projected to grow only slightly, rising from 1.2 billion in 2017 to 1.3 billion in 2050, the population of middle-income countries will grow by almost a quarter, from 5.7 billion to 7.1 billion, and low-income countries will see their combined population double, from 0.7 billion to 1.4 billion. The population of the group of least developed countries will rise from 1 billion to 1.9 billion. Thus, population growth is projected to be largest, and most rapid, in countries facing the greatest challenges in ending poverty and hunger and ensuring health, education and equality for all.

8. All population projections have a degree of inherent uncertainty, which increases as the projection interval grows longer. To account for this uncertainty, statistical procedures were applied to the population projections presented here, yielding a range of possible future trends. The median (or middle) trend was taken as the most likely trajectory, known as the "medium variant" of the official projections presented in *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision* (see figure I). Based on an analysis of past trends, the medium variant assumes a continued decline in the fertility level for countries where the number of births per woman is still relatively high; it also assumes a slight increase in fertility in countries where the current

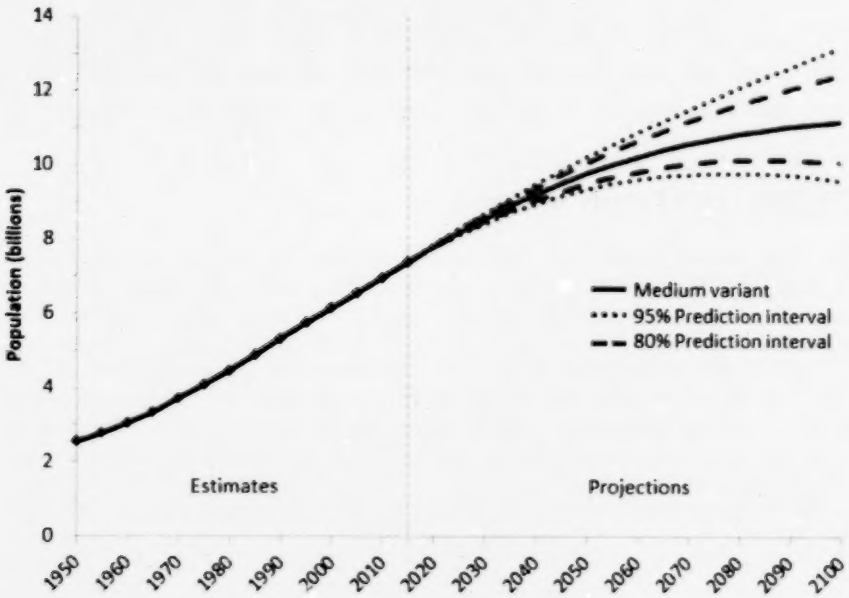
[1] As categorized by the World Bank in 2016.

fertility level lies below two births per woman. Life expectancy at birth is projected to rise throughout the world, based on the observation of an ongoing reduction in mortality rates for almost all countries.

9. The uncertainty of the United Nations population projections is described by prediction intervals based on the range of possible future trends. These intervals indicate that the global population will be, with a certainty of 95 per cent, between 8.4 and 8.7 billion in 2030, between 9.4 and 10.2 billion in 2050, and between 9.6 and 13.2 billion in 2100 (see figure I). Therefore, the world's population will most likely continue to grow throughout the present century. This growth will decelerate gradually over the next few decades, and there is a possibility that the global population will start to decline (slightly) towards the end of the century.

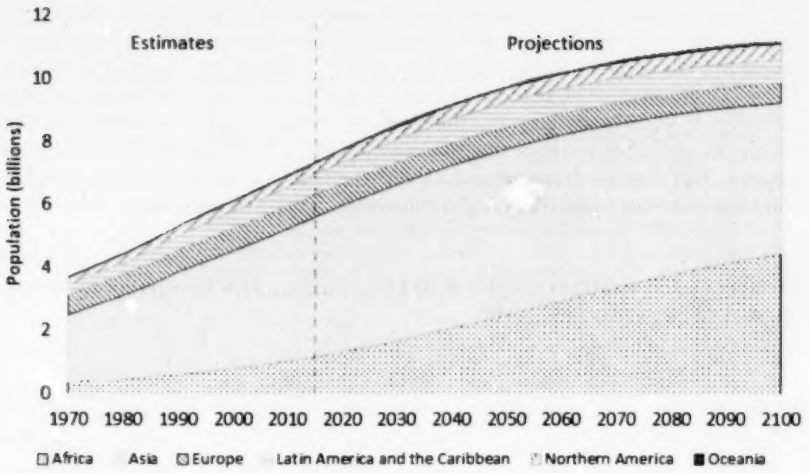
Figure I

Estimates and projections of total world population, with prediction intervals of 80 and 95 per cent, 1950–2100



10. The populations of geographic regions are projected to take divergent paths. The population of Africa, the fastest growing geographic region, is projected to double between 2017 and 2050, increasing by 1.3 billion people (see table 1). The projected growth in Asia will add 0.8 billion to a population of 4.5 billion by 2050. The population of Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America and Oceania together are expected to grow by 0.2 billion between 2017 and 2050, while the population of Europe is projected to decline slightly, by 26 million people. The proportion of the global population living in Africa is expected to increase from 17 per cent in 2017 to 26 per cent in 2050. The proportion in Asia is projected to decline from 60 to 54 per cent over the same interval, while the share of global population living in all other geographic regions combined will fall from 24 to 20 per cent (see figure II).

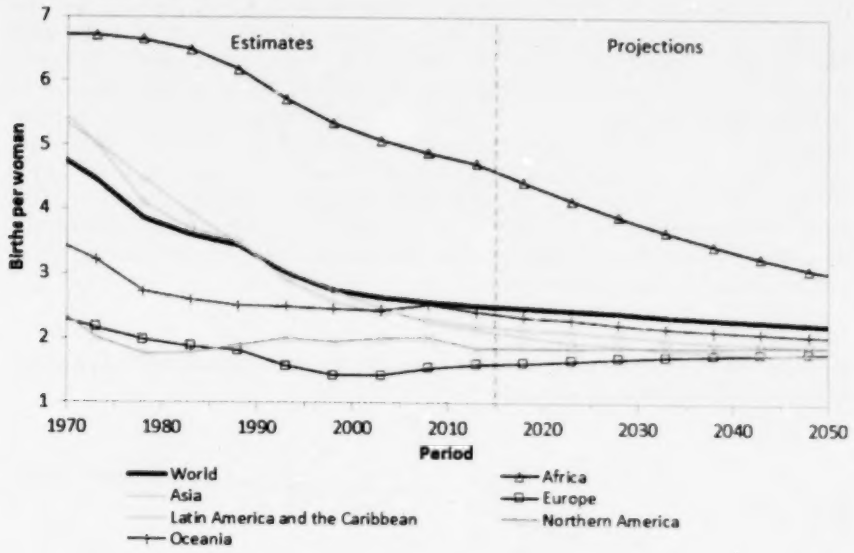
Figure II
Population of geographic regions, 1970–2100



III. Fertility and family planning

11. The world's level of total fertility declined from an average of 4.5 births per woman in 1970–1975 to 2.5 births per woman in 2010–2015. The world's fertility is expected to continue to decline and could reach 2.2 births per woman in 2045–2050 (see figure III). Except for Africa, all geographic regions today have a total fertility of less than the global average of 2.5 births per woman. There were 48 countries with a fertility level of four or more births per woman in 2010–2015, of which 40 were located in sub-Saharan Africa. Because of the relatively high level of fertility in these countries, a large proportion of the population belongs to younger age groups, and the number of youth is growing faster than in other geographic regions. Many of these countries regard their fertility level as too high and have policies aimed at lowering fertility.

Figure III
Total fertility (births per woman), for the world and by geographic region, 1970–1975 to 2045–2050



12. Fertility contributes to population growth in the long run when it is above the level required to replace the population and to population decline when it lies below that level. Nevertheless, even if fertility falls immediately to the replacement level or below in a given country, there will be a period of continued growth owing to the reproductive potential of relatively large cohorts in the age range during which childbearing typically occurs. This characteristic of demographic growth is known as "population momentum".

13. Since the 1970s, an increasing number of countries have reached fertility levels below the threshold of around 2.1 births per woman required for replacement of the population over time, given relatively low levels of mortality. Some countries have remained below this threshold for several decades. In the early 1970s, around one fifth of the world's population, including nearly all of the population of Europe and Northern America, lived in a country with a fertility level that was below the replacement level. Between 2010 and 2015, almost one half of the world's population lived in 1 of the 83 countries with fertility in this range. Sustained subreplacement fertility is increasingly regarded as a challenge by national Governments, as it contributes significantly to the ageing of their populations in the long run. In 2015, 29 Governments in Europe and 26 in other regions reported policies aimed at increasing fertility.

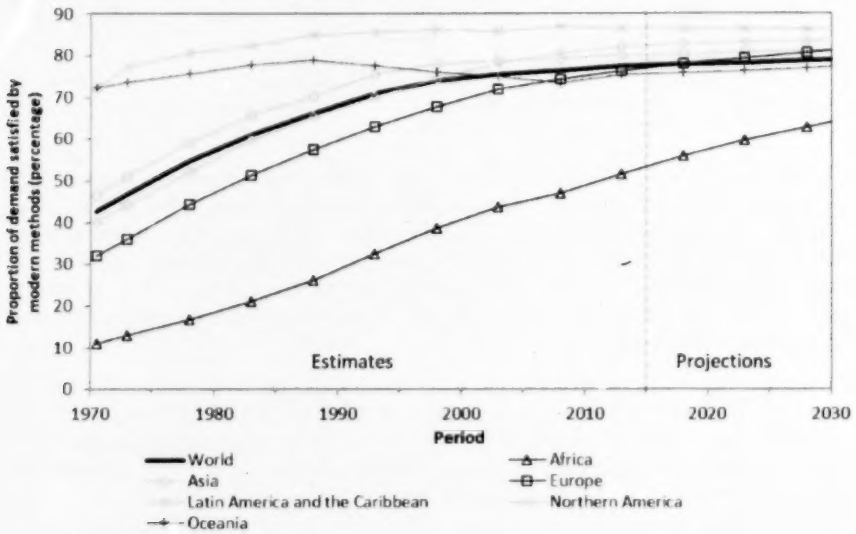
14. Between 1990 and 2017, contraceptive use among married or in-union women aged 15 to 49 grew from 55 per cent to 63 per cent; owing to the increasing availability of family planning services, a growing number of women and men were able to realize their right to decide, freely and responsibly, on the number and spacing of their children. Because of a rising demand for family planning, the increasing level of contraceptive use between 1990 and 2017 was not matched by an equivalent decline in the unmet need for family planning; nonetheless, between 1990 and 2017 the proportion of married or in-union women with an unmet need for family planning did decline from 15 per cent to 12 per cent. In Africa, as many as one in five married or in-union women have an unmet need for family planning, that is to say, they affirm

that they want to stop or delay childbearing but are not using any method of contraception to prevent pregnancy.

15. Worldwide in 2017, the proportion of the demand for family planning that was satisfied by using modern contraceptive methods (indicator 7.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 3) was 78 per cent, an increase from 69 per cent in 1990 (see figure IV). Across geographic regions, the demand satisfied by modern methods in 2017 was by far the lowest in Africa, where the use of modern contraceptive methods by couples who wish to prevent pregnancy remained low at 56 per cent. In all other major areas, the proportion of demand satisfied by modern methods was above 75 per cent. In 2017, less than half of the total demand for family planning was being met with modern methods in 45 countries (including 32 in Africa). In an additional 64 countries, more than half but less than 75 per cent of the total demand was being met by the use of modern methods.

Figure IV

Demand for family planning satisfied by modern contraceptive methods among married or in-union women aged 15-49, 1970–2030



16. Early marriage, early childbearing and unwanted pregnancy can have adverse social and economic consequences for girls and young women and impose health risks on both mother and child. Early marriage is an important predictor of early childbearing, as married adolescents are less likely than unmarried adolescents to use contraceptives to delay a first pregnancy and are also less likely to use modern contraceptives. Among women between the ages of 15 and 19, pregnancy and childbirth complications combined are the leading cause of death globally. [2] To counter these risks, adolescents need sexual and reproductive health-care services that are designed to meet their specific needs.

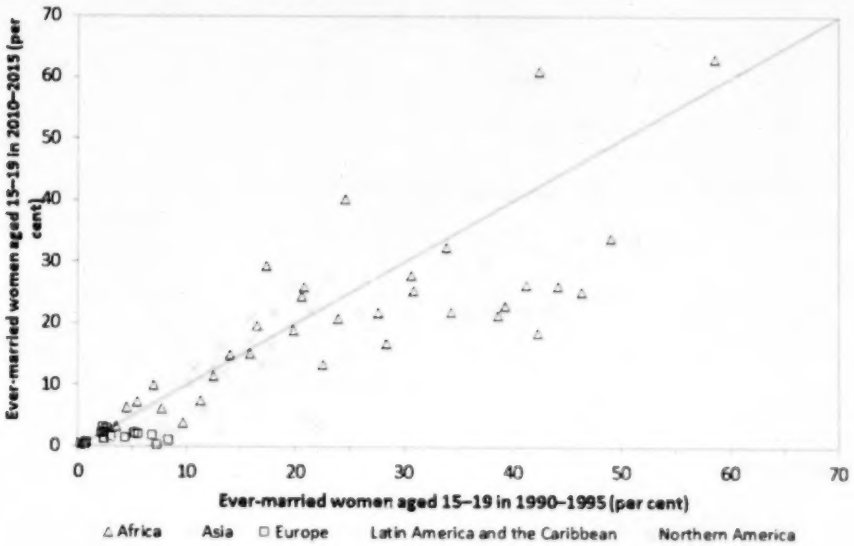
17. The percentage of adolescent females who had ever married, shown in figure V, decreased in most countries (in 75 out of 100 countries with available data) between 1990–1995 and 2010–2015. The markers below the diagonal line indicate countries where the percentage of ever-married adolescents declined. In 26 countries, 12 in

[2] World Health Organization, "Adolescents: health risks and solutions", fact sheet (updated May 2017), available from www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs345.

Europe and Northern America and 7 in Latin America and the Caribbean, the percentage decreased by at least 50 points. The percentage increased in 11 African countries and in 8 Latin and Caribbean countries.

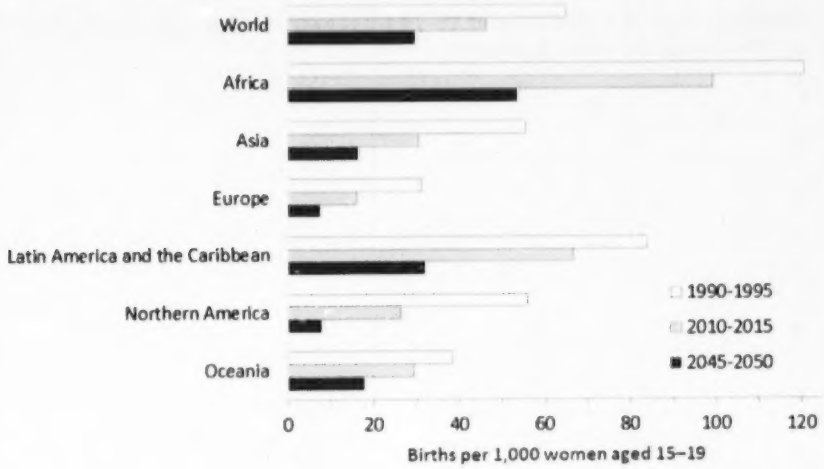
Figure V

Proportion of married women aged 15–19 by country and geographic region, 1990–1995 compared with 2010–2015



18. As early marriage has decreased, so has early childbearing. Globally, adolescent fertility has declined since 1990–1995. The average adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19) was 65 in the early 1990s and declined to 46 by 2010–2015. For 2045–2050, a further global decline to 30 annual births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 is projected (see figure VI). In Latin America and the Caribbean, the adolescent birth rate has declined significantly, but remained relatively high in 2010–2015, at 67 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19, and is projected to decline to 32 in 2045–2050. Adolescent fertility is expected to remain high in Africa, too, with 24 countries having an adolescent birth rate above 100 in 2010–2015 and 24 countries projected to have a rate above 50 in 2045–2050. In contrast, for all countries in Europe and Northern America and for most in Asia and Oceania, the adolescent birth rate was below 50 in 2010–2015 and projected to decline further until 2045–2050, to below 10 in many countries. The prospects for this continued decline will depend on investments in girls' education, reduction or elimination of early marriage, and expanded access to information, education and services in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

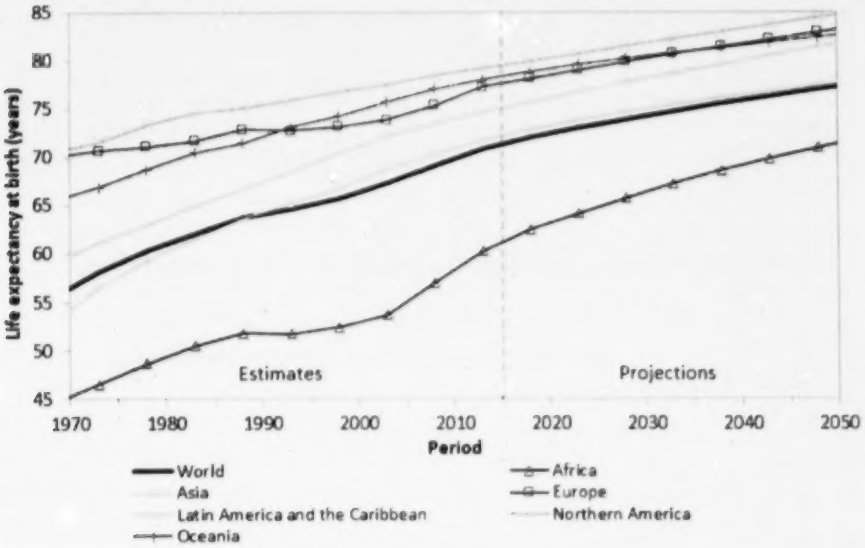
Figure VI
Adolescent fertility, for the world and by geographic region, 1990–1995, 2010–2015 (estimates) and 2045–2050 (projections)



IV. Mortality

19. In the second half of the twentieth century, the decline of mortality that started in the nineteenth century in Europe and other developed countries accelerated and spread globally. Between 1970–1975 and 2010–2015, global life expectancy at birth rose by 12.7 years, from 58.1 years to 70.8 years, for both sexes combined, and is projected to increase further to 76.9 years in 2045–2050 (see figure VII). By the end of the century, global life expectancy at birth is likely to exceed 82 years. In 2010–2015 the life expectancy of women was 73.1 years and that of men was 4.6 years lower at 68.5 years. The difference in life expectancy at birth between Africa and Northern America, the geographic regions with the lowest and highest life expectancy, respectively, decreased from 25 years in 1970–1975 to 19 years in 2010–2015 and is expected to decline to 13 years in 2045–2050.

Figure VII
Life expectancy at birth, for the world and by geographic region, from 1970–1975 to 2045–2050



20. In 2010–2015 the high-income countries reached, on average, a life expectancy at birth of 80.4 years. Thirty-two countries and areas had a life expectancy of more than 80 years, the majority of them in Europe. The highest life expectancy for a national population was recorded for Japan (83.3 years). Nevertheless, 25 countries, including some of the world's poorest countries, have still not reached a life expectancy of 60 years. Life expectancy at birth for the group of least developed countries was 62.9 years on average in 2010–2015.

21. For countries heavily affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa, the progress made in life expectancy at birth since the 1950s was countered by declining life expectancies during the 1980s and 1990s. In sub-Saharan Africa, life expectancy had reached 49.1 years in 1985–1990 but then declined to 48.9 years in 1990–1995, followed by only marginal gains until 2000–2005. In recent years some of the losses resulting from HIV/AIDS were reversed, and sub-Saharan Africa achieved a life expectancy at birth of 57.9 years in 2010–2015.

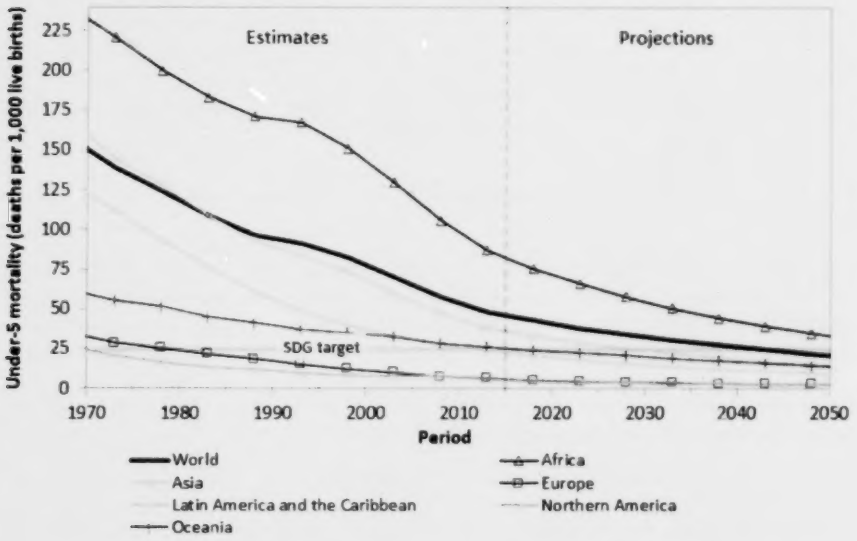
22. The increase in life expectancy at birth commonly starts with reductions in the risk of death occurring among young children. High infant and child mortality is largely a result of a high incidence and fatality of communicable diseases at younger ages. Progress in reducing infant and child mortality from these diseases consequently depends largely on improvements in living conditions, sanitation, nutrition, and health technologies, such as vaccines, that contribute to preventing common mortality from infections and malnutrition. The under-five mortality rate — the probability of dying between birth and a child's fifth birthday — declined worldwide from 91 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990–1995 to 48 in 2010–2015 (see figure VIII). Over the same period, under-5 mortality in Asia declined from 84 to 38 per 1,000 live births, and in Latin America from 49 to 24 per 1,000. The largest absolute reduction in under-5 mortality was recorded in Africa, where the rate declined from 167 to 87 deaths per 1,000 live births.

23. Target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 3 calls for a level of under-5 mortality in 2030 of no more than 25 per 1,000 live births. Latin America and the

Caribbean already reached this target, on average, in 2010–2015. According to the most recent mortality projections from the United Nations, both Asia and Oceania will also meet the target by 2030. Europe and Northern America have already achieved the target and are expected to reach under-5 mortality levels of less than 5 per 1,000 by 2030. Some countries, however, seem unlikely to meet the target if current trends continue. Globally, there are 59 countries, including 43 in Africa, 9 in Asia, 4 in Latin America and the Caribbean and 3 in Oceania, where the achievement of target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 3 is unlikely given current trends, suggesting the need for significant additional resources and efforts to obtain the desired result.

Figure VIII

Under-5 mortality, for the world and by geographic region, 1970–1975 to 2045–2050



24. Target 1 of Sustainable Development Goal 3 requires reducing the maternal mortality ratio globally to less than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. From 1990 to 2015, the global maternal mortality ratio fell by 44 per cent, reaching 216 per 100,000 in 2015.[3] The number of deaths from maternal causes declined from an estimated 532,000 in 1990 to 303,000 in 2015. All developing regions experienced substantial reductions in maternal mortality between 1990 and 2015. Nevertheless, the rate remains above 500 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in sub-Saharan Africa and above 100 in the Caribbean, Oceania, and South-Eastern and Southern Asia. To achieve target 1 of Sustainable Development Goal 3 globally by 2030 will require an accelerated pace of reduction in the maternal mortality ratio.

25. Once life expectancy at birth has reached high levels, further increases depend on reducing mortality at older ages, as measured by increased life expectancy at age 60. Globally, the average person turning age 60 could expect to live an additional 20.2 years in 2010–2015. This indicator is projected to rise to 22.9 years in 2045–

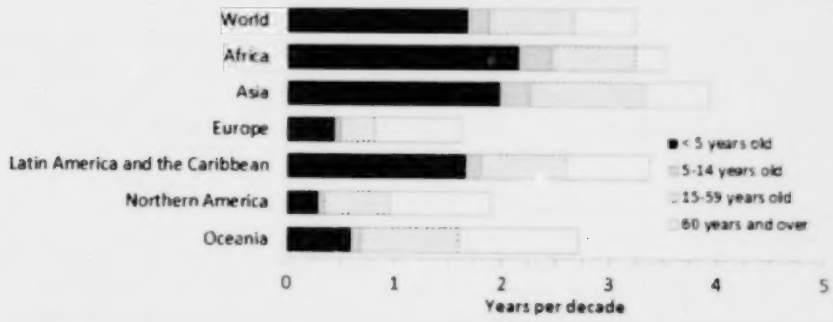
[3] World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank and United Nations Population Division, "Trends in maternal mortality: 1990 to 2015 — estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division" (Geneva, WHO, 2015).

2050. Between 1970 and 2015, the contribution of reduced mortality at ages 60 and above to the increase in life expectancy at birth was about 0.6 years per decade, while the contribution from reduced mortality below age 5 was about 1.7 years (see figure IX). Between 2015 and 2050, it is expected that the contribution to the rise in global life expectancy from each of these two age groups will be around 0.5 years per decade. In regions where mortality at younger ages is quite low already, such as Europe and Northern America, the future contribution of reduced mortality below age 15 will be negligible compared with the impact of the anticipated reductions in mortality above that age.

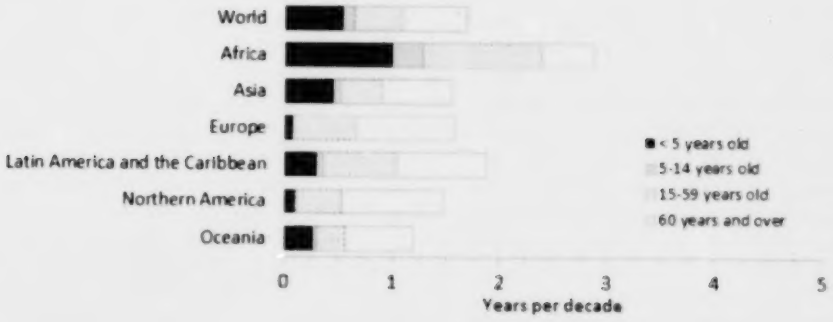
Figure IX

Contribution of reductions in age-specific mortality to improvements in life expectancy at birth, for the world and by geographic region, 1970–2015 and 2015–2050

A. 1970–2015 (estimates)



B. 2015–2050 (projections)



V. Changing population age structures

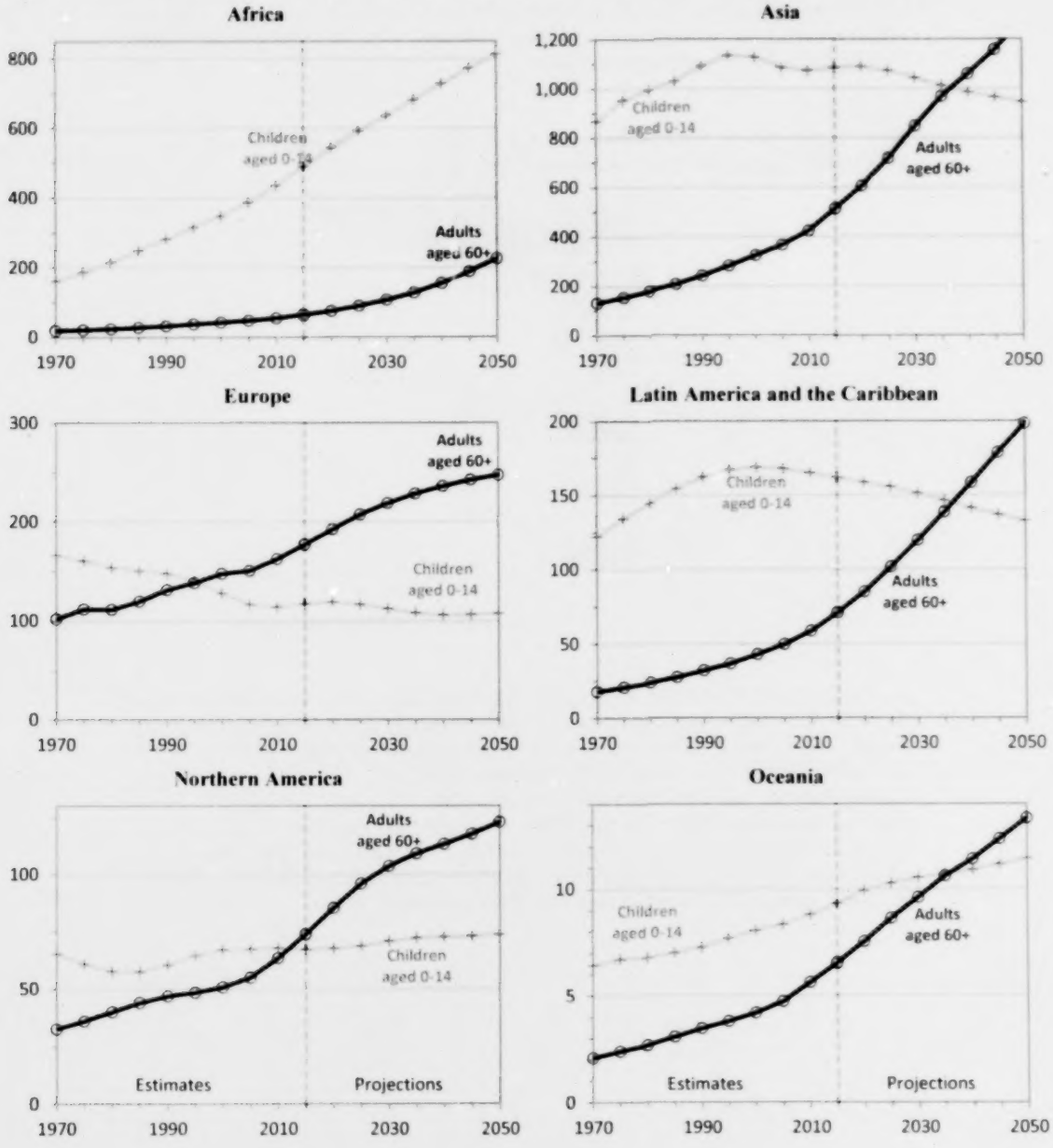
26. Population ageing is a global demographic trend with major consequences. It is a long-term process characterized by a rising proportion of population at older ages and a shrinking proportion at younger ages. The pace of population ageing is determined mainly by the timing and pace of the decline in fertility. The reduction of mortality at older ages also contributes to population ageing. In addition, international migration can affect the age structure of countries of origin or destination, depending on the number of migrants and their average age compared with the population size and age distribution of the countries involved.

27. Population ageing can be illustrated by tracking trends in the number of persons or the proportion of the total population in different age groups. In 2017, about 61 per cent of the world's population was between the ages of 15 and 59, while about 26 per cent were under 15 years of age and 13 per cent were aged 60 years or over. According to population projections by the United Nations, the number of children will remain stable at around 2 billion between 2017 and 2050; the number of persons aged 60 years or over will reach about 2 billion by 2050, doubling from 1 billion in 2017. The population aged between 15 and 59 years of age is expected to increase from 4.6 billion in 2017 to 5.6 billion in 2050. Thus, the group of people aged 15 to 59 years is expected to grow at a slower rate than the group of people aged 60 years or over; as a result, the share of this middle age group in the global population is projected to decline by 4 percentage points, falling from 61 to 57 per cent between 2017 and 2050. A large part of the increased share of those aged 60 and above is attributable to the increased share of those aged 80 and above, which is expected to increase from 1.8 to 4.3 per cent of the world's total population. This age group is growing faster than any younger age group.

28. Population ageing started at different times and is proceeding at varying speeds across countries and geographic regions. Trends in the number of children under 15 years of age compared with the number of people aged 60 years or over depict the different stages of the ageing process by region (see figure X). Europe and Northern America have the oldest populations; in these regions, children below 15 years of age are already outnumbered by peopled aged 60 years or over. The ageing process is more advanced in Europe compared with Northern America, where the number of persons aged 60 years or over surpassed the number of children only recently. Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania are projected to follow a similar path over the next few decades, with the older population expected to outnumber the population of children by 2040. In Africa, in contrast, the population of children is expected to grow rapidly and to remain much larger than the population that is aged 60 and above between now and 2050.

29. When fertility falls and the number of births declines, the first result is a rise in the proportion of the population that is of working age. Later, the share of the working-age population may decline as population ageing comes to dominate population trends. In the interim, however, the expansion in the share of the working-age population provides an opportunity for rapid economic growth on a per capita basis and may thus yield a "demographic dividend" during a window that typically lasts for a few decades. Realizing the dividend requires the availability of productive jobs for the growing number of persons of working age. In that situation, an increasing proportion of the working-age population can contribute to rapid economic growth and sustainable development. During this period, policies to support sustained and inclusive economic growth and to promote decent work for all, in keeping with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, can potentially free up resources for investment and increase the productivity of labour, boosting per capita incomes. In this context, investments in health, education and employment opportunities for young people are crucial inputs for human development and economic growth.

Figure X
Population under 15 and above 60 years of age by geographic region, 1970–2050 (in millions)

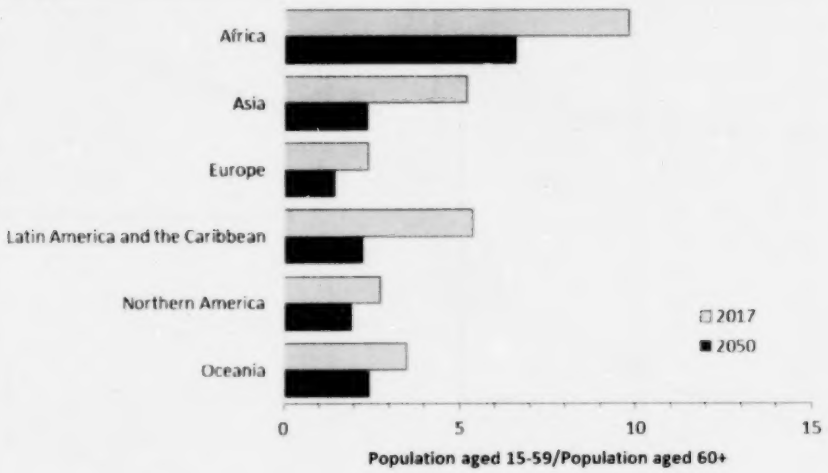


30. The duration of this intermediate phase, characterized by a rise in the proportion of the population that is of working age, is limited. Once the number of older persons starts to increase, the size of the population aged 20 to 59 years compared with the population at older ages begins to shrink (see figure XI). At that point, fewer persons of working age are available to contribute to the support of older persons. Today, the relative size of the working-age population compared with the population at older

ages is the largest in Africa, with the former being almost 10 times as large as the latter, and the smallest in Europe, where the working-age population is only about two-and-a-half times as large as the older population. As populations grow older, the relative size of the working-age population compared with the older population will decline further in all geographic regions.

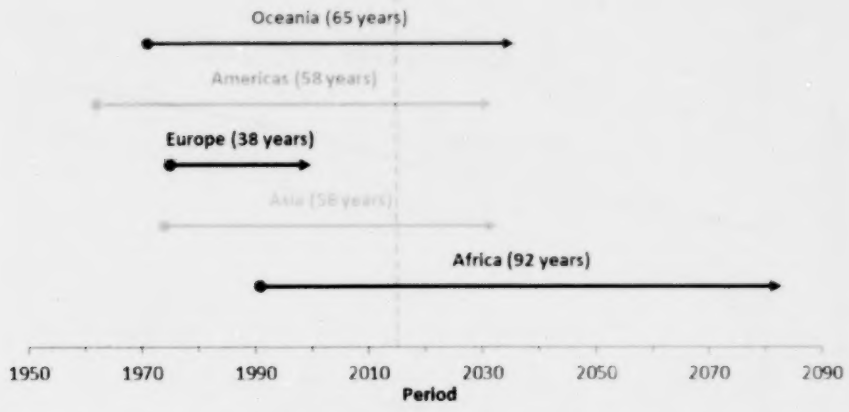
Figure XI

Ratio of population aged 20-59 years to population aged 60 years or over by geographic region, 2017 (estimates) and 2050 (projections)



31. The period for realizing a "demographic dividend" is characterized by a rise in the proportion of the working-age population compared with younger and older age groups. The duration of this interval depends on the speed and magnitude of the decline in fertility. The phase of "demographic dividend", according to a study of national transfer accounts, started in Europe in the 1960s and was followed by all other regions, except Africa, in the 1970s. In Europe, the dividend came to an end around 2000, after about four decades, while the Americas, Asia and Oceania can expect it to end during the 2030s, after roughly six decades. In Africa, the dividend will last for about nine decades, until the 2080s (see figure XII).

Figure XII
Time period of a potential "demographic dividend" and its duration (in years) by geographic region

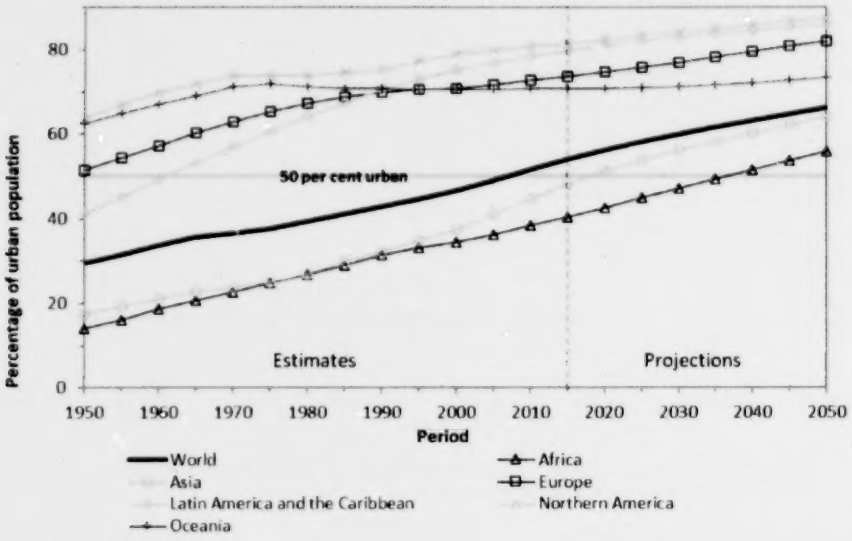


Source: Andrew Mason and others, "Support ratios and demographic dividends: estimates for the world", United Nations Population Division Technical Paper No. 2017/1 (New York, 2017).

VI. Urbanization and city growth

32. Globally, 54 per cent of people live in urban areas in 2018 and projections indicate that the future growth of the world's population can be accounted for almost entirely by growth in the number of city dwellers. By 2030, the share of the world's population living in urban areas is expected to reach 60 per cent; in 2050, roughly two thirds of the world's population will be living in urban areas, compared with roughly one third in 1950. Currently, the most urbanized region of the world is Northern America at 82 per cent, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (80 per cent) and Europe (74 per cent) (see figure XIII). In 2018, a majority of the population is still living in rural areas in Africa and Asia, with 40 and 48 per cent of their respective populations living in urban areas. Both regions are urbanizing rapidly, however, and by 2030 it is projected that urban settlements will be home to 47 per cent of the population of Africa and 56 per cent of the population of Asia. The share of the urban population is expected to rise to 71 per cent in Oceania, 77 per cent in Europe and more than 85 per cent both in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Northern America.

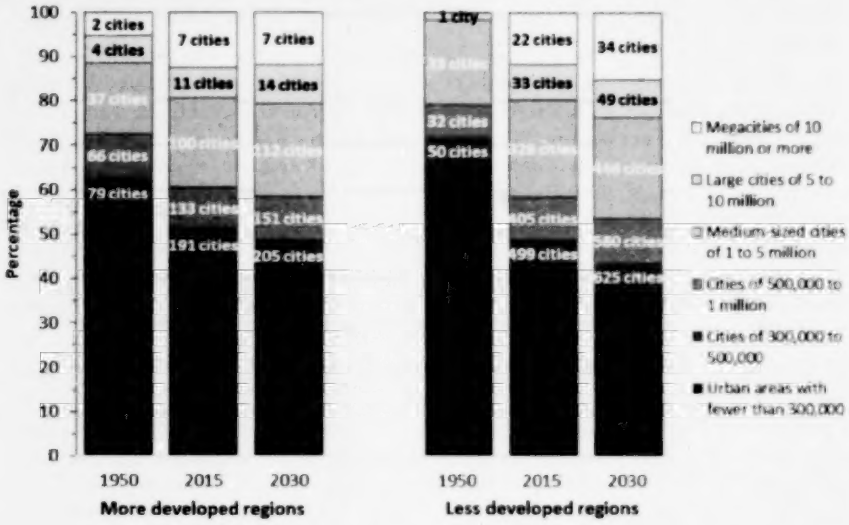
Figure XIII
Urban population as a proportion of total population by geographic region, 1950–2050



33. As the global urban population has grown, so too have the number of cities and the populations of most cities. The number of "megacities" (those with more than 10 million inhabitants) grew from just 10 in 1990 to 33 in 2018 and is projected to rise to 41 in 2030. All new megacities projected to emerge by 2030 are in the less developed regions (see figure XIV). Urban population growth is driven by the growth of cities of all sizes. The number of large cities (between 5 and 10 million inhabitants) increased from 21 in 1990 to 49 in 2018 and is expected to grow to 63 in 2030. The number of medium-sized cities (between 1 and 5 million inhabitants) and of smaller cities (fewer than 1 million inhabitants) is growing as well, especially in the less developed regions.

Figure XIV

Distribution of the urban population by size class of urban settlement, and number of cities in more developed and less developed regions, 1950, 2015 (estimates) and 2030 (projections)



34. Urbanization is driven in part by the migration of people from rural areas, who are drawn to cities in search of jobs and other opportunities. Nevertheless, the excess of births over deaths within urban areas is an important driver of population growth in many cities, particularly in the parts of the less developed regions where fertility remains high. A recent study of 23 city regions worldwide showed that for the majority of cities in Africa, an excess of births over deaths is the main cause of population growth.[4] Population growth in rural areas that causes such areas to become urban, and the outward expansion of the urban boundaries of cities, also contribute to urbanization. Thus, continued urbanization does not depend solely on rural-to-urban migration. In some cities, international migration is increasingly becoming another important driver of population growth. Cities, in turn, play a critical role in integrating migrants into host societies.

35. Urbanization has generally been a positive force for economic growth and human development. Cities are places where, thanks to a diverse and well-educated labour force and a high concentration of businesses, entrepreneurship and technological innovation can thrive. Urban areas also serve as hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, productivity, social development and more, where the proximity of commerce, government and transportation provide the infrastructure necessary for sharing knowledge and information. Approximately 80 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) is generated in cities.[5]

36. Urban dwellers are often more literate and more highly educated, are more likely to have access to decent work, adequate housing and social services, and can enjoy enhanced opportunities for cultural and political participation as well as gender equality. Economies of scale in urban areas can facilitate the sustainable provision of

[4] Mathias Lerch, "International migration and city growth", United Nations Population Division Technical Paper No. 2017/10 (New York, 2017).

[5] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change — Working Group III Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

infrastructure such as roads, piped water and electricity, as well as basic services such as education and health care, all of which are essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the linkages that cities and small towns establish with surrounding rural areas facilitate service delivery and infrastructure improvements more broadly and can expand opportunities for off-farm employment to rural dwellers as well.

37. Rapid and unplanned urban growth are challenges for sustainable development. Although the share of slum dwellers in developing countries declined from 39 per cent in 2000 to 30 per cent in 2014, more than 880 million people, including many internal and international migrants, continued to live in slums or informal settlements.[6] Owing to the rapid growth of population in urban areas, the number of people living in slums continues to grow. Unplanned or inadequately managed urban expansion can impair sustainability, owing to urban sprawl, pollution and environmental degradation. Indeed, cities are growing twice as fast in terms of land area as they are in terms of population.[7] Under such conditions, cities are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

38. Government policies for planning and managing urban growth can help ensure that the benefits of urbanization are shared equitably and sustainably. Sustainable Development Goal 11 is a commitment to making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Policies that aim to restrict rural-to-urban migration are generally ineffective at forestalling city growth and can even result in economic, social and environmental harm. Sustainable urbanization requires that cities generate adequate income and employment opportunities; provide the necessary infrastructure for water and sanitation, energy, transportation and communication; ensure equitable access to housing and services; minimize the number of people living in slums; and preserve natural assets within the city and surrounding areas.

VII. International migration

39. The number of international migrants, or persons living in a country other than their country of birth, has continued to grow in recent years. Worldwide, the number of international migrants reached an unprecedented 258 million in 2017, up from 248 million in 2015, 220 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000. The average annual rate of growth of this population increased from 2 per cent per year between 2000 and 2005 to 2.9 per cent between 2005 and 2010. Between 2010 and 2015, the number of international migrants grew more slowly, at around 2.4 per cent per year, and between 2015 and 2017 the number grew at around 2.0 per cent per year.

40. During the period from 2000 to 2017, the number of international migrants grew by about 85 million. The largest part of this increase occurred in Asia, where the number of international migrants grew from 49.2 million in 2000 to 79.6 million in 2017. Over the same interval, the migrant population also grew rapidly in Europe, from 56.3 million to 77.9 million, and in Northern America, from 40.4 million to 57.7 million.

41. The growth in the global number of migrants was driven mostly by an increase in the number of international migrants moving from Asian countries, which increased by 40.6 million, or 62 per cent, between 2000 and 2017. The increase was also significant for international migrants coming from countries in Africa (14.7 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (13.0 million) and Europe (11.6 million).

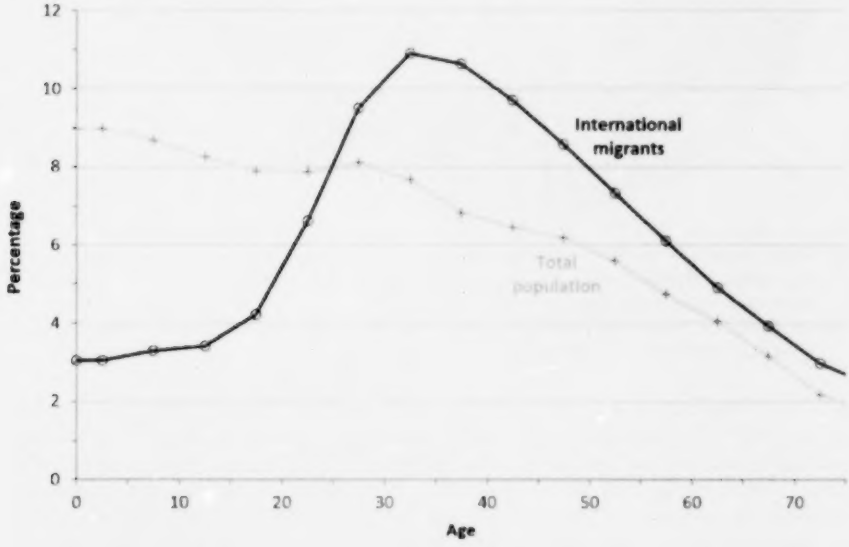
[6] United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015* (New York, 2015).

[7] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change*.

42. At the end of 2016, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world reached an estimated 25.9 million, up from 25.3 million at mid-year in 2015, representing around 10 per cent of all international migrants. Around 83 per cent of these refugees and asylum seekers were hosted by countries in developing regions. Turkey hosted the largest number, with around 3.1 million persons. The second largest country of asylum was Jordan (around 2.9 million), followed by the State of Palestine (2.2 million), Lebanon (1.6 million) and Pakistan (1.4 million). The main countries of origin for refugees and asylum seekers were the Syrian Arab Republic (5.7 million), the State of Palestine (5.4 million), Afghanistan (2.9 million), South Sudan (1.4 million) and Somalia (1.1 million).[8]

43. Most migrants are of working age; compared with the total population, a larger proportion of international migrants were in that age range in 2017 (see figure XV). Globally, children are underrepresented among international migrants. This reflects the fact that children who are born in the host country of their immigrant parents do not meet the definition of "international migrant" that is used for statistical purposes.

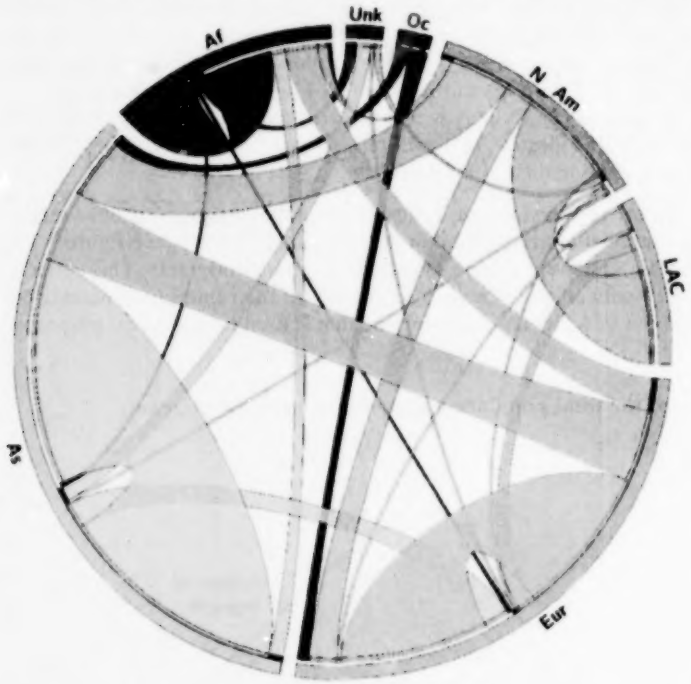
Figure XV
Age distribution of the total population and of international migrants worldwide, 2017



44. International migrants reside mainly in countries of the same region in which they were born. The majority of the international migrants born in Europe (67 per cent), Asia (60 per cent), Oceania (60 per cent) and Africa (53 per cent) were living in another country of the same region in 2017 (see figure XVI). International migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean (84 per cent) and Northern America (72 per cent) were primarily residing outside their region of birth, however.

[8] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global trends: forced displacement 2016", annex table 2, available from www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf; and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), "UNRWA in figures", as of 1 January 2017, available from www.unrwa.org/resources/about-unrwa/unrwa-figures-2017.

Figure XVI
Number of international migrants, by regions of origin and destination, 2017



Note: The bands represent international migration within a geographic region or from one geographic region to another. The width of the bands represents the number of international migrants in a particular flow.

Abbreviations: Af, Africa; As, Asia; Eur, Europe; N_AM, Northern America; Oc, Oceania; LAC, Latin America and the Caribbean; and Unk, Unknown.

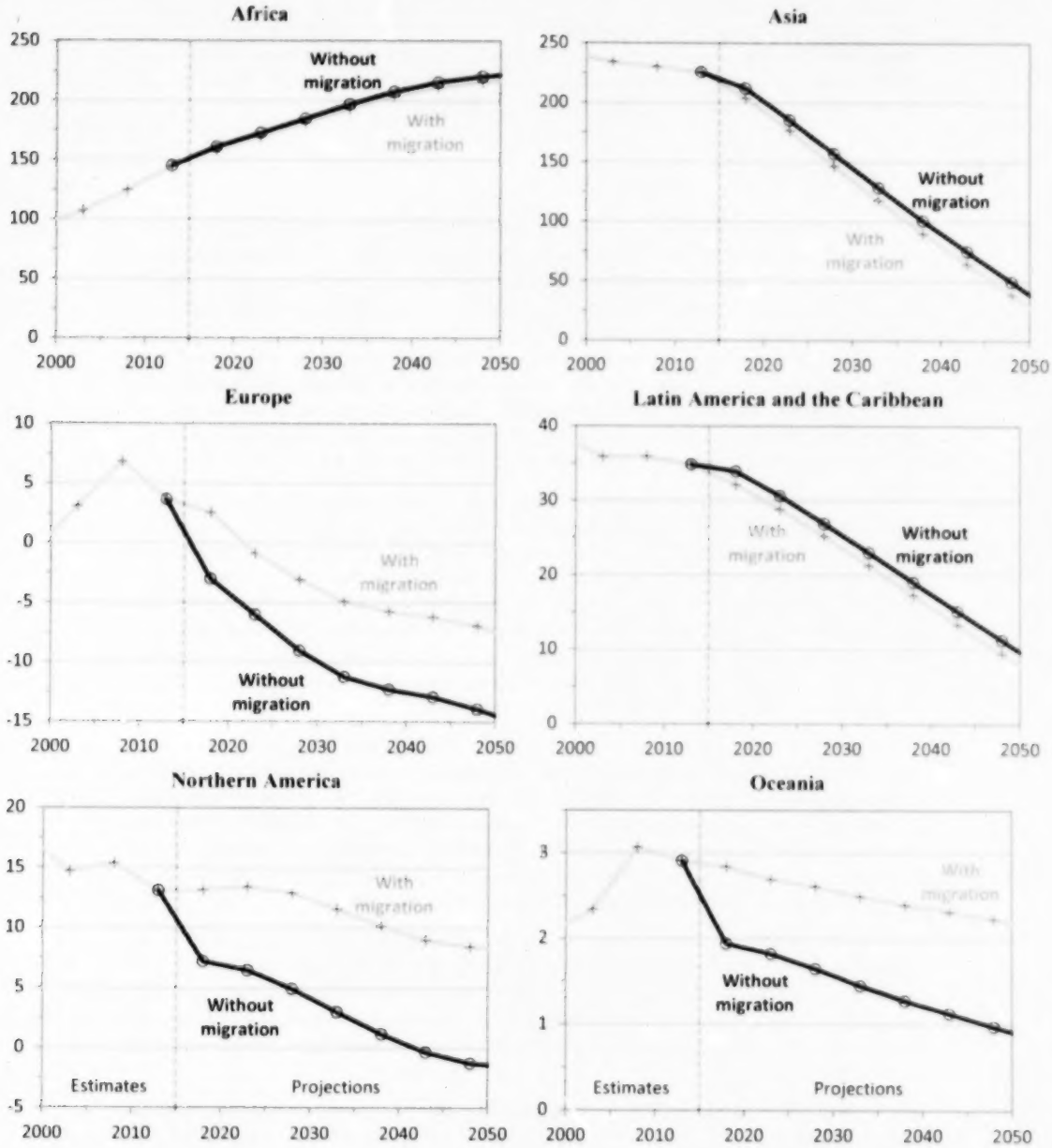
45. The contribution of international migration to population growth in some parts of the world is considerable. In countries with an excess of deaths over births, migration can slow or counter trends of population decline. According to estimates from *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, the greatest positive contribution of migration to population growth occurred in Northern America, where it accounted for 42 per cent of growth between 2000 and 2015. Without the contribution of international migration, the population of Europe would have declined between 2000 and 2015. With few exceptions, international migration did not significantly affect population numbers in most parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

46. The contribution of international migration is projected to have a growing impact on the future size of populations. Figure XVII shows the projected change in total population under two scenarios: the medium-variant projection, which generally assumes a continuation of recent levels of net migration, and the zero-migration variant, which assumes the absence of international migration for all future time periods, starting in 2015–2020. For Europe, the population is projected to decline from 2020–2025 onwards, when the contribution of international migration will, according to the medium-variant projection, no longer be sufficient to compensate for the surplus of deaths over births. Without the effect of international migration, that is, according to the zero-migration variant, the shrinking of the European population would start earlier, by 2015–2020. In Northern America, without the projected

contribution of international migration, the population would start to decline in absolute terms from 2040 onwards.

Figure XVII

Estimated and projected changes in total population over 5-year time intervals by region, from 2000–2005 to 2045–2050, with and without international migration as from 2015–2020 (in millions)



47. International migration cannot halt or reverse the long-term trend towards population ageing caused by declining fertility and rising life expectancy. Nevertheless, because international migrants are, in general, younger than the population in countries of destination, they add more to the size of the working-age population than to the older population, resulting in a slower ageing of the population.

48. The ageing of the world's population leads, in most geographic regions, to significantly increasing ratios of the number of older persons to those of working age, even with the projected contribution of international migration. Without the contribution of international migration, the increase in these ratios between 2017 and 2050 would be higher by 8 percentage points for Northern America, 6 percentage points for Oceania and 5 percentage points for Europe.

VIII. Conclusions

49. The world's population reached 7.6 billion in 2017. Global population growth, currently at a rate of 1.2 per cent per year, is expected to slow in the coming decades. At the end of the century, when the global population may number around 11 billion, its rate of growth is expected to be close to zero. The number of persons added per year, currently more than 80 million, will decline slowly in future years: it is expected that in 2030 the annual increase in global population will be a little more than 70 million, and in 2050 just over 50 million. Most of the growth in future decades will take place in the 47 least developed countries, of which 33 are located in sub-Saharan Africa, where the challenges of ending poverty and hunger and ensuring access to health care, education and equal opportunity for all are the greatest.

50. Countries are facing diverse situations over the coming decades regarding population growth rates, changing age structures and shifts in the spatial distribution of population (including between rural and urban areas) and in the size and direction of international migration flows affecting their populations. Reconciling the different contexts of demographic change with the priorities for human development and sustainability, as established in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is a shared global responsibility. National strategies will need to take population dynamics into account in order to make sound decisions on the policies and resources required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

51. Some changes seem to be pointing in the right direction. High fertility (five or more births per woman) is becoming rare, including among countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the least developed countries. Many of these countries, however, still have a fertility level above four births per woman, resulting in populations that are relatively youthful and growing rapidly. If fertility continues to decline in these countries, there will be an opportunity for rapid economic growth thanks to a favourable age structure: the so-called "demographic dividend".

52. In 83 countries, fertility was below the replacement level of 2.1 births per woman in 2010–2015. Countries with sustained below-replacement fertility will experience challenges resulting from the rapid ageing of their populations over the next few decades. Many of those countries have policies to support parents and families in caring for children, and in some cases these policies seem to have boosted the fertility level.

53. The level of unmet need for family planning among married or in-union women has decreased globally since 1990. Nevertheless, there remains an unmet need for family planning, and the level of unmet need is much higher in Africa. Increased support for providing information and services will be needed to achieve the goal of ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including

for family planning, as agreed by the international community as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

54. The rise in life expectancy at birth in recent decades is expected to continue until the end of the century. By 2045–2050, global life expectancy could be almost seven years higher than it is today; countries with relatively high levels of mortality at present, including many African countries and least developed countries, are expected to experience above-average gains in life expectancy over this period. The rise of life expectancy at birth will depend on reducing child and maternal mortality in these countries at an unprecedented pace, while also addressing the remaining burden of major communicable diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases.

55. It is important for policymakers to be aware of, and react to, the transformation of the population age distribution that occurs over the course of the demographic transition. An initial rise in the share of the population that is of working age creates a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth and sustainable development. Many countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa and the least developed countries, have the possibility of reaping a "demographic dividend" in the coming decades. Policies to support a healthy and educated population, provide decent jobs and create conditions conducive to investment and growth will enable countries to benefit from a high or rising proportion of the working-age population.

56. In other countries and regions, the process of demographic transition started earlier and has reached a more advanced stage. In parts of the Americas, Asia and Oceania, the working-age population is relatively large, thanks to a substantial decline of fertility in recent decades, and thus the time to reap a "demographic dividend" is now, lasting roughly until the 2030s. In Europe and Northern America, that stage of the demographic transition has already come to an end and countries are now facing the challenges of an ageing population. This situation requires policies to adapt the economy and public programmes to the needs and realities of a population with a declining share of those who are of working age and an increasing share of those at older ages.

57. Urbanization continues to shape the spatial distribution of the world's population, and it is expected that most population growth in the future will be reflected in the increasing size of urban areas, especially in the less developed regions. Internal and international migrants, often young and well educated, contribute to the concentration of population in cities and large urban agglomerations. Urbanization has generally been a positive force for economic growth and human development, including for the surrounding rural areas, which with appropriate policies and planning can benefit from social and economic linkages to nearby cities and towns. Properly managed, urbanization can help in combating poverty, inequality and environmental degradation.

58. Governments have increasingly recognized the contribution of international migration to sustainable development, and they have agreed on the importance of international cooperation to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration, with full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of all migrants, refugees and displaced persons. The unprecedented number of international migrants in recent years, including the rapidly growing number of refugees and asylum seekers, has drawn attention to the issue and increased the priority given to international migration on the global agenda. On 19 September 2016, the General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, calling for the development of two global compacts in 2018: a refugee compact, being prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and a migration compact, being developed by Member States through the Assembly.

59. The availability of high quality, accessible, timely and reliable demographic data, disaggregated according to key characteristics of individuals, is essential for planning and implementing policies and programmes in follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The capacity to collect, disseminate and analyse relevant data and statistics at the global, regional, national and subnational levels can facilitate evidence-based policymaking and support the monitoring of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Improvements in civil registration and health information systems, the use of georeferencing as a standard practice of data collection, and broad participation in the 2020 round of censuses are essential elements for tracking the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Traditional data sources require strengthening while the world also needs to learn to exploit alternative sources of information, including "big data", which can in no way replace the traditional sources of information about demographic change and global population trends.